

## “Crawling On Our Own”

Sermon by Pastor Dan Harrison, Church of the Covenant 6/23/19

*Galatians 3:23-27*

*Until the time when we were mature enough to respond freely in faith to the living God, we were carefully surrounded and protected by the Mosaic law. The law was like those Greek tutors, with which you are familiar, who escort children to school and protect them from danger or distraction, making sure the children will really get to the place they set out for.*

*But now you have arrived at your destination: By faith in Christ you are in direct relationship with God. Your baptism in Christ was not just washing you up for a fresh start. It also involved dressing you in an adult faith wardrobe—Christ's life, the fulfillment of God's original promise.*

When we were children, our parents typically made us do chores, right? It was routine and expected: Take out the trash, clean our bedroom, cut the grass, do the dishes. They had us do these things to maintain the home but also to prepare us to maintain our own homes one day, without their watchful eye. They taught us self-care as well: Brush our teeth, take a bath, clip our nails, eat our vegetables. They had us do these things in order to stay hygienic and strong but also to prepare us to be on our own one day—and to stay healthy. They instructed us to wash our clothes, iron them (or at least unwrinkled them), comb our hair, and shave, in order to look presentable as young people but also to prepare us to fit into larger society, in hopes that we could access important resources to be successful or at the very least stay alive. All of these things were taught in the spirit of “self-preservation.”

Think about it, though, humans are the most vulnerable species on the planet in the first few years of life. We aren't born walking or crawling or swimming like most all other species which produce young capable of at least moving from point A to point B. We need to be held and comforted, cradled. It is a fundamental part of our process to start from our moment of birth with expressing absolute need and receive complete and total care. We are 100% dependent on another at our start and for years to come. This certainly makes us unique, even among mammals. For this, the human mother digs deep into her primordial instincts to provide such care. Dr. James Kimmel in his article “The Human Baby,” says, “The mother-infant relationship, because of its physical intimacy, minimal separateness, strong mutual dependency, and the necessity for unity in functioning, collaboration, empathy, and identification may well be the most social of all human relationships. No other relationship, including that of the adult couple, tests the power of the human capacity to imagine, wonder, and become ‘another’, since it is at first nonverbal, and then minimally verbal for many years. A baby cannot tell you with language who he is, what he feels, or what he wants or needs. The mother must come in touch with the ‘forgotten language’, those non-verbal ways of communicating with another of our kind, that once was for humans (before we developed language) the only way to express our caring feelings to another.” I knew this firsthand by observing my wife playing the card game “Uno” with our first child while he was still in the womb, and with each of our four children thereafter.

Our nature tells us to build ample scaffolding around our children, to teach them the transferable lessons of life which will help them be successful later, when on their own. My dad often talked proudly about how he taught me to crawl as a baby. He said I would prop myself up on the floor and drag myself around but for some reason couldn't figure out how to crawl. Until one day when he got on the floor with me and put me in position with my knees bent under me, and he did the same with his own body, and he literally showed me how to lift my bottom up and move my knees forward. While simply amused at the start, he said that eventually I began to imitate what he was doing with his body. Finally, I was crawling! In fact, he said after that brief session, I was hard to keep up with. I crawled everywhere and got into everything. He said that he then started to regret teaching it to me in the first place.

The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Galatian Christians said that the Mosaic Law had been put in place to serve as our teacher, our guide—since we were in essence young children in our spiritual walk: He said it had served its purpose of protection and preservation, much like Greek tutors escorting the children to and from school. Then, he said, we matured in our faith through the Messiah, evolved, able to access God directly instead of through religion. This was a watershed moment for the community's overall spiritual journey. He was calling it a defining moment where the religious structure that had been in place for already several hundred years has now evolved into an individual faith no longer defined in the context of institutional religion. It is now defined, he says, by one's own very personal, individual faith. He said Jesus, the Christ, paved the way to this liberated view of spiritual journeying through his life's teaching, and with it human equity and empowerment. If we were to read just a bit further in his letter to the Galatians, Paul tells them that there are no more racial, religious, or class divides ("no Greek nor Jew")—that all are simply God's children, co-humans in this world, in the spirit of the Messiah, carving out their individual, equally important spiritual journeys. This was news to a society where racial privilege and religious solidarity and even citizenship were paramount in defining one's place, status, and purpose. Paul, however, dispelled such strata as institutional hierarchy which does not exist in the new evolution of spiritual living. Instead, this newfound liberty was founded on the principles of Jesus' life's work: His teachings themselves.

And together, if we were to amass the teachings of Jesus into simple, understandable principles, what would they entail? (open to congregation for answers)

i.e. **1) Love your neighbor as yourself 2) Take up your cross daily 3) Love God with all your heart, mind, and strength 4) Judge not lest you be judged 5) Worship God in spirit and in truth 6) Be peacemakers 7) Clothe the naked, give drink to the thirsty, food to the hungry, what you do to the least of these, you have done unto our Lord..**

This is the essence on which we build our spiritual lives, our unique spiritual journeys, both inward and outward. These are our principles, not our structure. These are the truths that we adopt as morals, on which we build our hopes, our understanding, our reasoning, and our behaviors. This is our base, our foundation, and on it we build our home. Without these, though, we find ourselves having to rebuild and rebuild and rebuild and, well, rebuild. Jesus said (Matthew 7), *"everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."* Putting our beliefs, our truths into practice, according to Jesus, is the act of building. Perhaps this is us moving from a strictly inward journey to an outward journey as well. And maybe it's not having the foundation perfectly set before building all the rooms. Maybe the fact that we're using the right materials, namely "the rock," that makes it work perfectly, because as life has shown us and the many who have come before us, the house is never complete. We will always be working on it. So, today I encourage each of us to take the building of it seriously, because you are each special, unique, and gifted with only one life to live on this earth (well, as far as we know). So, make it count. Use good building materials, make sure it is firmly planted on the rock of your faith, and keep building. Don't give up. None of us are done yet.

Shalom